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SUBJECT: BAHAMAS REACTION TO EMBASSY HUMAN RIGHTS OP-ED POINTS FINGER AT CHINA

REF: NASSAU 697; NASSAU 731; NASSAU 741

¶1. The Embassy op-ed on the GCOB human rights UN Third Committee votes sparked immediate reaction in the form of editorials and articles in several New Providence and Grand Bahama dailies beginning on December 22. The op-ed was also published on Caribbean online news web sites. An editorial in The Nassau Guardian stated that "every Bahamian should be gravely concerned" about the "blunt criticism" issued by Ambassador Avant and called on the GCOB to issue an explanation of its vote. The editorial suggested that the change in position had something to do with the "stronger ties" Prime Minister Ingraham's government "is forging with communist China." An article in a Grand Bahama newspaper also made this connection and quoted the former President of the Grand Bahama Chamber of Commerce, "they've [GCOB] been borrowing money from China...it's pretty simple, Ingraham has to go where his bread is buttered...desperation makes for strange bed fellows."

¶2. Fred Mitchell, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, told a reporter that The Bahamas had a right to its position on international issues and has historically stayed away from resolutions specifically condemning countries. Several Bahamian blog sites noted that the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) chose to vote with the U.S. on these resolutions but that the Free National Movement (FNM) changed to the CARICOM position that shies away from "condemnatory resolutions." One blog noted that the GCOB had previously changed this CARICOM position only because they were requested to do so by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The Ambassador's op-ed received supportive comments from local human rights groups as well as members of the legal community.
AVANT